

City Club Speech

May 28, 2019

Thank you, Jay, for that introduction.

Thank you all for coming.

This is my fourth time addressing the City Club in the last four years.

It is always an honor and a pleasure to be here, and it is especially an honor to address this group for the first time as Mayor of the City of Chicago.

I want thank everyone who has been part of the journey of our campaign . . . and I want to recognize and introduce a few members of my administration who are here today.

We have been hard at work, and it is hard to believe that inauguration day was only last week. And for the record--I am not going to make any unsubstantiated claims about the crowd size at my inauguration.

Suffice it say, I was humbled and moved by the outpouring of love and support from so many Chicagoans who joined us to mark a new beginning for Chicago.

For those of you who saw and heard from me on the campaign trail, you ought to have a pretty strong idea of what my administration's agenda is.

Many have said we are still in the “honeymoon” phase. Really?

Folks, let me tell you: there is no “honeymoon” in city government.

As you may know, as part of our effort to prevent what is typically a weekend of violence, I traveled all across the city over Memorial Day Weekend.

In so many ways, there's no place better than Chicago on these first warm weekends, when we're finally coming out of the season of shoveling and dibs and hibernation. And elections.

But in too many Chicago neighborhoods, weekends like the one we just got through fill residents with dread.

This weekend, despite our coordinated efforts, despite all our agencies showing up and delivering programming and resources and just a *presence*--43 people were shot in our city. And 5 died.

So we can't claim victory. We can't celebrate. No.

We have so much more work to do.

I was struck, this weekend, traveling around the South and West Sides, how desolate it sometimes felt for blocks and blocks.

How hard it was to simply find a place to sit down and have lunch, or grab a cup of coffee.

In other neighborhoods, the energy was electric. I stopped by the Mole de Mayo fest in Pilsen, and the streets were filled with people. Small businesses along 18th Street were bursting with customers.

I toured North Avenue Beach with Police Superintendent Johnson. It was jam packed.

Then, I traveled to Rainbow Beach.

It was warm and sunny, but Rainbow Beach was virtually empty. There are likely many reasons for this. But one is surely that people don't feel safe enjoying all that our city has to offer.

As I walked along the sand, I couldn't help but think back to the history of Rainbow Beach.

I thought of 1919, when a Black teen swimming too close to the then all-white Rainbow Beach sparked a race riot that killed 38 people.

I thought of the early 1960s, when the NAACP and other civil rights activists tried again to integrate Rainbow Beach by holding "wade-ins."

Still, the racist violence and segregation continued.

It must not be lost on us--

The legacies of racial discrimination and race- and class-based inequality, are tied to the culture of corruption that has favored the clouted and the wealthy.

And those legacies, intertwined, lie at the root of every problem my administration faces today.

Chicago's income and housing segregation;

the concentrated violence;

the precarious financial reality for working families;

the lack of good paying jobs;

the systematic disinvestment we see in a place like Austin, compared to the open spigot of capital flowing to places like Lincoln Park--

All of these pieces are the result of deliberate policy choices made in decades past by people in power in this town.

No, they aren't new---they are as old as the machine. They *are* the machine.

The neighborhoods that are today shut off from employment opportunities and lending capital were once thriving hubs of investment and economic activity. Garfield Park. Roseland. Woodlawn. Austin. North Lawndale.

What happened?

Culminating in 1968, these neighborhoods saw white families--and the capital they had and could attract--leave after being scared out by redlining real estate agents and banks seeking to profit from racism and fear.

The material wealth of the black families that were left behind, tied to real estate prices, plummeted.

Government was quite literally valuing black families less than white families. That reality must, and will, end.

A recent report by the Urban Institute shows that wealthy neighborhoods in Chicago receive an average of more than four times as much market investment per household as the average high-poverty neighborhood.

On average, majority white neighborhoods receive more than 4.5 times as much market investment per household as majority African American neighborhoods, and more than 2.5 times as much investment as majority Latinx neighborhoods.

The violence that plagues these economically isolated and racially segregated communities is also no surprise.

It's what happens when the government and private capital pull out and focus elsewhere.

When schools are closed and crumbling, when once thriving residential blocks become abandoned, and then overgrown with weeds, and then open-air drug markets.

When commercial corridors that used to have small banks and restaurants and theaters now can't get loans to run businesses, and can't compete with large chains that won't invest.

When people--mostly black and brown men--are prevented from getting a job or fully participating in our civic life because of the system of mass incarceration.

Violence is the symptom to a much bigger, long-unfurling cause.

Let me be clear here--the communities that I'm talking about--black and brown communities, while now devoid of private investment, are not in deficit.

Quite the contrary, they are among the crown jewels of our great city, even if they are socially and economically segregated and struggling.

They are home to world-class parks, world-class architecture, world-class restaurants and arts institutions, and are--and have long been--strong, resilient, and dynamic.

They are some of the great sources of community and civic wealth in Chicago, producing many of our organizers, our artists, our culture-makers, our poets, and our small business successes.

They are filled with proud civic and community leaders who have been forced to work *against* government and market forces.

They now have a partner and supporter in City Hall, and a government that will work *with* them. Because I know that government created these conditions and systems, and so under my administration, it will help solve them.

Changing that system of power, and how it must now be directed to improve the daily lives and pocket books of all Chicagoans--is what my administration will be about.

That's what voters sent me here to do.

And that is what I mean when I talk about equity.

It's about changing the systems--predicated on race and structural racism, on leaving working families struggling check to check--that determine who wins, who loses, and who is left out altogether.

That's why I started my administration by eliminating this wonky-sounding but powerful practice known as aldermanic prerogative.

Aldermanic prerogative is the practice of aldermen using their office to unilaterally decide who gets a business license, who gets a permit, who gets a sidewalk cafe, who gets an awning for their storefront.

Some aldermen with this power were literally picking winners and losers; who got help, and who got hurt.

It is a gateway to opportunity that, up until I signed the executive order to end it on May 20, some aldermen wielded as they saw fit.

Some aldermen and their benefactors in the real estate industry have used it to reinforce segregation in Chicago, to pile subsidized and affordable housing into black and brown wards and keep it out of white wards.

They've used it to make the cost of opening and running a business so high that entrepreneurs are shut out from a chance to make a living, invest in a neighborhood, and contribute to Chicago's civic life.

Aldermanic prerogative is a tool that has been used by the powerful to build a system that excludes, disinvests, and isolates working people.

Ending it was fundamentally necessary to achieve the policy goals I am outlining here today.

In the first hundred days, we'll push for more sweeping ethics reform:

Making sure no elected official can monetize their position for personal gain;

Strengthening the office of the Inspector General;
Raising the penalties for ethics violations; and more.
Because Chicago pride does not require continuing the “Chicago Way.”

My administration needs aldermen to be thought partners who legislate with city-wide challenges in mind – and I’m encouraged by initial productive conversations with many of them who are welcoming these changes.

Change is hard, but change is necessary. I turned to the gathered City Council members a week ago because they need to see that the people expect us to put the public first.

So where do I want to go from here?

First, we need to reduce the gun violence. For too many Chicagoans, fear is their constant companion. It is with them when they wake up in the morning, and it is with them when they go to bed at night.

While my administration is working to address the systemic causes of this kind of violence, we must address the horrifying symptoms.

If we can’t keep Chicagoans safe from violence in their communities, nothing else we do will matter.

This weekend, at a Memorial Day event where we were honoring the sacrifices that our brave young men and women have made, a speaker referenced *drinking from the cup of freedom*.

That stuck with me. What does it mean to drink from the cup of freedom?

To me, that means having the freedom to live your authentic life.

To live without fear of violence.

That can't come without access to opportunity.

Violence cannot be solved by law enforcement alone. We all have a part to play.

And for my administration, that is true as well--from our economic development team to our public health team to our community engagement team, to name a few.

That is the philosophy behind the Our City, Our Safety initiative we launched last week.

That means not just bringing more resources to our schools and our communities, but more cooperation and support among agencies and local organizations.

It means assessing and implementing recommendations to increase the homicide clearance rate.

It's long overdue that the City Council act swiftly, in the first hundred days, to pass the ordinance proposed by the Grassroots Alliance for Police Accountability, or GAPA, to create civilian oversight over CPD.

And it means piloting new efforts to respond to non-fatal shootings with City-funded programs and services for those affected.

There are countless individuals, including far too many children, who are suffering from undiagnosed and untreated PTSD that is a common result of exposure to violence.

We will work to ensure they get the treatment they need.

All Chicagoans, regardless of where they live, must be able to enjoy that freedom.

What's clear to me is that unless we provide more resources to these communities, we'll never get ahead of the violence.

Second, we must address our financial crisis without balancing the city's budget on backs of poor people.

That means the City must stop extracting wealth from poor families through regressive fees and fines. This approach to revenue traps people in debt spirals and isolates them from meaningful employment and a chance to live a life with dignity.

The first hundred days of this administration will be the beginning of the end for these policies.

It means finally strengthening the Welcoming City ordinance to protect undocumented Chicagoans from the backwards policies of the Trump administration.

It means ensuring that the wages and working conditions of families keep up with the basic economic realities of American life.

With our friends in the labor movement, we will increase the minimum wage to \$15 an hour by 2021.

We will finally pass Fair Workweek legislation to ensure that hourly workers have stable schedules that give them the predictability to allow them to enroll in classes or book child care or homecare for aging relatives.

These measures aren't just good for workers--they'll ensure hundreds of thousands of Chicagoans have stability and money in their pockets to spend in their neighborhoods.

What's good for Chicago's working families can also be a boon to small business and our local economies.

That's a vision we should all be able to agree on and fight for.

At the same time, we must confront our financial mess head on.

Let me tell you a bit about my financial team--Chief Financial Officer Jennie Bennett and Budget Director Susie Park.

In the few weeks since Jennie and Susie have come on board, they, along with their legion of municipal finance experts and math geeks, have been burning the midnight oil pouring over our financial data and working with our advocates in Springfield to identify a path to improve our fiscal situation.

Yes, we must generate revenue. And we can't do it alone.

We'll need to work with Springfield and the federal government--and we need to make sure we're asking the very wealthy and big corporations to pay their fair share and provide some relief to working families.

I want to congratulate Gov. Pritzker, Speaker Madigan, President Cullerton and members of the General Assembly for taking the first steps in passing the Fair Tax.

I've also endorsed the legalization and taxation of recreational marijuana as a revenue source, and I'm hopeful that it passes this week.

My team is also working hard to advance a plan that finally creates a Chicago casino. No offense to Indiana, but it makes no sense that we allow Chicago and Illinois dollars to increase *Indiana's* revenues.

As I've said many times, Chicago is the economic engine of Illinois and our economic futures are intertwined—failing to partner with leadership in Springfield will not happen on my watch.

I am committed to being transparent about our finances and working on fair and sensible steps to spend your taxpayer dollars wisely, stabilize our city's future without stripping wealth from poor folks, and working together to find a path forward to fully fund the pensions we have promised to working people.

Finally, we will work to attract new investment capital to those areas of the South and West Sides that haven't seen new investments in a generation.

We will ensure that “mission” capital, such as philanthropy and other flexible funding are directed to where they are needed most.

This is how we will jumpstart businesses and support critical civic infrastructure investments such as parks, public art, business incubators, and environmental improvements.

And we'll do it in concert with our new team of dedicated, conscientious public servants: our new Chief Equity Officer Candace Moore, Housing Commissioner Marisa Novara, Deputy Mayor for Neighborhood and Economic Development Samir Mayekar, and Director of Policy Dan Lurie.

I'm thrilled that these folks have agreed to join this administration, and I can't wait to announce more names in the coming weeks, including members of our Board of Education.

These will be the people who I will rely upon to execute on the vision I have laid out for you.

Who is going to help us do this?

You all.

Aldermen. Our City departments. Teachers. Organizers. Residents. Businesses. Our artists and storytellers. And just as importantly--our young people.

I grew up in a community without adequate resources and supports for someone of my skin color and socioeconomic background.

Today, for all the work that has been done in our city, there are still too many children . . . especially black and brown children . . . who have reason to believe that the city does not put them first.

For Chicago to change for the better, that must change for good.

We have a long way to go--but some aspects of what I saw this past weekend gave me hope.

I saw young people, teachers, pastors and police officers . . . marching together to reclaim their neighborhood.

I saw the families and friends of loved ones taken far too soon come together to say enough is enough . . . that no one else should experience the trauma they have endured.

And I saw our children playing together . . . laughing together . . . and growing together.

In every neighborhood, I saw the glimmer--the prospect--of what a truly equitable and just Chicago can look like.

Our work together is just beginning.

Our challenges must be confronted together and solved together, and with a commitment to righting the inequities and imbalances of generations past.

Our shared love for Chicago must shape our city's shared future.

It begins now in these first 100 days. It will not be easy.

Meaningful, lasting progress never is. But it will happen.

Thank you for listening, thank you for the faith you have put in me, and thank you for giving me the great honor of serving this city as mayor.

Now I believe we have time for some questions.